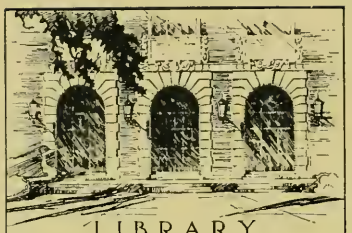

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# THE UNIVERSITY SERMON

AND

# COLLEGE SERVICES.

## A LETTER

ADDRESSED TO

## THE VICE-CHANCELLOR,

BY

CHARLES WALDEGRAVE SANDFORD, M.A.,
SENIOR CENSOR OF CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD;
CHAPLAIN TO THE LORD BISHOP OF LONDON; AND LATE WHITEHALL PREACHER.

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JOHN HENRY AND JAMES PARKER.
1865.

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My dear Mr. Vice-Chancellor,

The Memorial on the subject of the University Sermons which I sent you the other day would have received a larger number of signatures, had it been expressed in more general terms. Few of those to whom I have spoken think our present arrangement respecting the hours of University Sermons and of College Services perfect. Most think a change desirable, but they are unable to decide what this change should be. Our chief difficulty arises from the fact that St. Mary's is a Parish Church, and is required for a Parish Service as well as for the University Sermons. The Vice-Chancellor, I believe, has power to fix the time of the University Sermons. This of course he would be unwilling to exercise, so as to interfere with the Parochial Service, but I am sure an arrangement might without much difficulty be effected, which would satisfy the requirements both of the University and of the Parish.

So far as this question concerns the University alone, there are three classes of persons whose interests should especially be considered. First and chiefly, the Undergraduates who are *not* accustomed to attend the University Sermon; secondly, the Undergraduates who have lately addressed memorials to the Authorities in their several Colleges praying for a weekly Communion; and last, but not least, the College Servants. I do not mention the Tutors; for it is not their convenience, as they themselves would be the first to acknowledge, that ought specially to be consulted, but the good of those who are committed to their care. A Tutor's pupils are his parish, and as an ordinary parish minister in the arrangement of the Sunday Services does not consider what is agreeable to himself, but what is most conducive to the interests

of his parishioners, so it is not for us to object to any scheme that may be proposed, that it would deprive us of our morning or afternoon walk, but to reflect whether it will help our pupils to observe Sunday better than many of them now observe it.

I have spoken of the Undergraduates whose habit it is *not* to attend the University Sermon, as the persons whose interests should first be consulted, and for this reason among others, that they form the vast majority. That such is the case is evident from the fact that it is only to hear some well-known preacher that the University Church is filled; and, when filled, it contains at most four hundred Undergraduates, whereas there are fifteen or sixteen hundred now in residence. Besides, our first thought surely should be in this, as in all other matters, how best to take care of those who either cannot or will not take care of themselves. Those who have been brought up in religious households, and have been loyal to the principles of their early training, may with safety be left to themselves. Whatever change we may make in the Services, they are not likely to spend Sunday badly. The persons whom we wish to influence are those who never attend the University Sermon, and who consequently, except in those Societies where College Sermons are preached, never hear a word of warning or advice addressed to them from the pulpit, from the day they enter the University to the day they leave it. By our present system they are left with nothing given them to occupy their thoughts from nine, or at the latest ten o'clock, in the morning, when the Morning Service is over, till four o'clock, or even later in the afternoon, when the Evening Service begins. No wonder that Sunday is in some Colleges a favourite day for breakfast parties and luncheons, and for idling in the College quadrangles. A heavy responsibility surely rests with College Authorities, who having in their hands the arrangement of the Sunday Services in their several Societies, see such men pass before them Sunday after Sunday as they

leave the College Chapel, but in spite of the example which you in Exeter College have set us, let the golden opportunity slip of giving a few words of counsel to them from the pulpit. We are accustomed to preach to others of wasted opportunities: do we in this matter make the most of our own?

It is urged that sermons are provided by the University, which it is the duty of all Undergraduates to attend. But, it may be answered, the Statute respecting attendance at the University Sermon is obsolete. It cannot be enforced. There is not room in St. Mary's, still less in Christ Church Cathedral, for a fourth part of the residents. A Proctor who attempted to enforce the Statute would have to fine for non-attendance not only Undergraduates, but Tutors, Professors, and Heads of Colleges. In fact the Statute was framed at a time when University and College discipline was a very different thing from what it now is. The Undergraduates were younger. More importance was attached to the "hearing of sermons," as there were then few printed books, and sermons were the principal vehicle of religious instruction. To restore the state of things contemplated by the Statute is an impossibility. Moreover the University Sermon is in many cases a stately essay, uninteresting and unintelligible to Undergraduates of the class of which I am speaking, dealing it may be with deep doctrines of theology, about which they know nothing, or with questions of controversy, of which, fortunately for them, they have never heard before. What is wanted for such men is a practical sermon preached to them in their College Chapel by a person whom they know, and who knows them, and who can therefore speak to them with effect of their special temptations and shortcomings. Of course sermons will not of themselves make men better; they will not of themselves raise up the spirit of prayer in their hearts, or breathe warmth and life into their devotions: yet may they do something to soften the callous, to awaken the thoughtless and indifferent, to stir us all to live up to the pleadings of

our higher nature. What is required for the ordinary Undergraduate is a service at an hour that would make his Oxford Sunday more like a Sunday elsewhere—a service which would keep up the recollection of the church of his home, and put an end to the idle lounging in which he often now spends it, from having the obligatory duties of the day over at so early an hour.

The persons whose interests should next be taken into account are the Undergraduates who have asked for an opportunity of receiving the Holy Communion weekly. This service should be a separate service. There probably are many Undergraduates who make it a rule never to turn their backs on the Lord's Table, but who nevertheless might feel a reluctance to attend more than once, or at most twice a month. This rule they would be tempted to break, unless the Holy Communion were ordinarily a separate service. It should also be the earliest service in the day. Many of those who have petitioned for a weekly Communion, ask that it should be an early service; and without staying to discuss the ground of their request, we ought if possible to grant what they ask. We should also, I think, consult the feelings of those who might hesitate to cross in their surplices a crowded quadrangle in the middle of the day. It is not simply want of moral courage which might produce this hesitation, but the dislike of appearing to be better than their companions, or of tacitly rebuking their friends whom they might have to pass on their way to the College Chapel. If, then, the Holy Communion and Morning Prayer are to be separate services, and both are to be over before the University Sermon, it is evident that to enable us to attend all three conveniently the University Sermon should be at a later hour than 10.30 A.M.

Lastly, there remain the College Servants. In some of the Colleges, according to our present arrangements, it is impossible for the Servants to go to church on Sunday. In fact, Sunday is found by them, in some

Colleges, to be one of the busiest days in the week. For this reason, if for no other, the Morning Service should be held at a later hour than it is at present, that it would thus bring breakfast parties to an end, and set College Servants free in time to attend their parish church.

The arrangement to which these remarks point is—Holy Communion at 8 a.m.: Morning Prayer at 10, when a College Sermon might occasionally be preached: the Morning University Sermon at 12.

If College Authorities would undertake to provide a College Sermon, the Afternoon University Sermon might be abolished: or, in its place, an Evening Sermon might be substituted, to be preached in Christ Church Cathedral, with the consent of the Dean and Chapter, St. Mary's Church being wanted in the evening for the Parish Service. An Evening University Sermon possibly would not be popular with the Senior Members of the University; but the numbers of Undergraduates that attend the Evening Service in the parish churches of Oxford, and the numbers that attend the Evening Lenten Services, seem to shew that an Evening Sermon, if of a practical character, would be popular with them.

The need of some change in the arrangement of the Morning Services has been present to my thoughts for several years. It has been brought home to me more forcibly, it may be, than to others, because I live in a large quadrangle, containing nearly a hundred sets of rooms, all, except my own, occupied by Undergraduates. I cannot but feel, however, that for the success of this proposal it would have been better that it had been advocated by a member of another Society. I know the objection that will be brought against it. It will be said by some that it is a plan to sacrifice the interests of the University to the special interests of Christ Church. This, however, is not the case. Christ Church is not the only Society in which there are Undergraduates who do not attend the University Sermon. The fact that in the University Church

there is accommodation provided for no more than one-fourth of the Undergraduates proves this. Neither, on the other hand, is Christ Church the only Society in which there are Undergraduates who have asked for the opportunity of receiving the Holy Communion weekly. Before long, I hope, the Holy Communion will be administered weekly in every College.

In the hope of bringing this subject before the notice of the University, I should be glad if you would allow me to publish this letter. I trust that Members of Congregation will consider the question carefully and impartially, not regarding their own convenience, nor the interests of their own Society alone, nor the interests of any class exclusively, but the general good of the whole community.

Believe me to be

Yours very sincerely,

CHARLES WALDEGRAVE SANDFORD.

*Nov.* 20, 1865.

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